

THE PAUSE

From Weak Boundaries to Stronger Boundaries

A practical tool for noticing pressure, creating space, and choosing how you respond.

THE ARC WEAK BOUNDARIES → THE PAUSE → SETTING BOUNDARIES → STRONGER BOUNDARIES

The pause is the bridge between recognizing a pattern and choosing a different response. You can build this skill gradually.

1. RECOGNIZE WEAK BOUNDARIES

These may be habits learned to keep the peace or avoid conflict—not a character flaw.

- Saying yes before checking what you want or have capacity for.
- Over-explaining or defending a simple no.
- Feeling responsible for someone else's disappointment or anger.
- Ignoring discomfort, resentment, or exhaustion.
- Changing your answer because someone keeps pushing.

Reflection: Which pattern do you notice most often?

2. THE PAUSE: THE CHANGE POINT

The pause creates space between what happens and what you do next. You do not have to decide or respond immediately.

Notice your signals

- An urge to say yes, fix things, smooth things over, or make discomfort stop.
- Tension, dread, irritation, confusion, or feeling rushed.
- Thoughts such as “They’ll be upset if I say no” or “I have to explain myself.”

Create room to choose

- Take a breath, if helpful.
- Buy time: “Let me think about that.”
- Ask: “Do I want this? Do I have capacity? What is okay for me?”
- If you feel pressured or unsafe, delay responding, leave, or seek support rather than confronting the person.

Useful phrases: “I’ll get back to you.” “I need some time to think.” “I’m not ready to answer.”

3. SET THE BOUNDARY

A boundary identifies what is okay for you and what you will do to protect your time, energy, space, or wellbeing. It is about your participation—not controlling another person.

Three parts

- **Name your limit:** What works for you, and what doesn't?
- **Say it clearly:** Use a short, direct sentence when safe.
- **Choose your follow-through:** What will you do if the limit is ignored?

Examples to adapt

- "I can't take that on." • "I'm not available for that."
- "I'm willing to talk when we can speak respectfully."
- "I'm not discussing this right now."
- "If the conversation turns insulting, I'm going to step away."

You do not need a detailed explanation for a boundary to count. You can offer a reason if you choose, but you do not have to persuade someone to agree.

Practice: What limit would you like to communicate?

4. BUILD STRONGER BOUNDARIES

Stronger boundaries are not about being harsh or never accommodating anyone. They mean choosing consciously instead of automatically abandoning your own needs.

- Pause before agreeing, especially when rushed or pressured.
- Say no without excessive explanation.
- Let another person have their feelings without making them yours to fix.
- Repeat your limit calmly rather than debating endlessly.
- Follow through where it is safe and realistic.
- Notice progress even when you feel uncomfortable.

A QUICK CHECK-IN BEFORE YOU ANSWER

- Do I genuinely want to say yes? ■ Do I have the time, energy, and capacity?
- Am I choosing freely, or trying to prevent someone's reaction?
- What answer would respect my limits?

MY NEXT SMALL STEP

Situation where I'll practise pausing: _____

Words I can use: _____

Boundary or follow-through I'll practise: _____

Start small. You are allowed to take time and choose what is right for you. If setting a boundary could put you at risk, prioritize safety and find a safer way to respond.